

THE DEPARTMENT OF POLICE AS A MEANS OF DISTRIBUTING CHARITY.

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THE CITY OF CHICAGO has taken the initiative steps in a work of relief that undoubtedly will be followed by other cities, and I wish to give briefly an account of the work done during the cold spell of last winter.

The relief of the poor of the city has for many years past been handled by the county; but, as the appropriation for this year was small, it was impossible to cover the ground thoroughly; so when our extreme cold spell came on in January, his Honor, Mayor Swift, realised that something must be done, and at once. He felt satisfied that the citizens would gladly respond to his request for cash contributions, if they were assured that the contributions would be properly used. He therefore called the heads of the Police Department together on Monday, January 25, and a hurried consultation was held and plans made for quick service. It was decided that the Department should be utilised for ascertaining information of destitute cases, and for the immediate relief of all such cases.

It was further decided that the Mayor should issue a proclamation asking the citizens for contributions to be sent to him. This proclamation was published in the afternoon papers, and the morning papers of the next day, and immediately cash commenced to flow in to him, until we had a bank account of over \$61,000 to draw on.

The plan of action adopted was that an immediate order should be sent to all police stations notifying all officers to investigate along their posts, and wherever a case of actual destitution was found to telephone the particulars at once to the nearest police station. On receipt of the report at the station the commanding

officer was to load up in the patrol wagon sufficient supplies to provide for a week's sustenance for a family, and have it delivered at once.

By ten o'clock on Monday, January 25, I had started out to order the goods for the relief. We decided to give to each family of four or less, five pounds of fresh beef, five pounds of corn meal, five pounds of beans, five pounds of peas, one loaf of bread for each member of the family, and two hundred pounds of coal; and double that amount for a large family. I visited the best wholesale houses, and was able to secure a very low price on all goods that we would want, and I ordered large quantities of the above articles sent to each police station; so that by the evening of the first day the stations were all equipped with enough supplies to last them twenty-four hours.

During the first week we were not very particular in investigating the cases reported. We simply wanted to know that the persons were in destitute circumstances, and that they were without means to provide sustenance and fuel. The cold weather continued all through that week; the mercury going as low as twenty degrees below zero, and never higher than zero, and during that time there was not a case reported to our department that did not receive relief within one hour after the report was received; and I am well satisfied that only for our prompt action there would have been a great many persons either starved or frozen to death.

After the first week we were able to investigate all cases, and wherever we found a deserving family, they were given a relief card which entitled them to the amount of provisions named above every five days, and arrangements were made for delivering the coal in half-ton lots direct from the coal yards. We continued this work until the 20th of February, when the amount of money deposited to our credit in the bank was exhausted.

During the time we were engaged in this work, our supplies cost \$61,855.81. Our meat amounted to 546,232 pounds at an average cost of 4.22 cents per pound, making a total of \$23,084.76. Our orders for bread amounted to 470,736 pounds, a total of \$13,296.90, an average price of 2.82 cents per pound. Our orders for meal, beans, and peas amounted to \$9,750.48, an average cost of about 1 cent per pound. Our coal orders amounted to 6,004 $\frac{1}{5}$ tons, or an average of \$2.28 $\frac{1}{2}$ per ton, costing \$13,720.72.

We furnished food and coal to 65,557 families; an average of 2,731 $\frac{1}{2}$ families a day, or a total of 304,802 persons; being an average of 12,700 persons a day.

Every cent that was contributed to this fund was used in the purchase of supplies. There was not one cent paid out for clerk-hire, rent, extra time, or other expenses. In addition to the above purchases by our department, there were a great many thousand dollars' worth of goods donated in the way of coal, clothing, coffee, meat, fish, bread, blankets, shoes, and other goods, all of which was disbursed by this department.

The officers of the department entered into the work with a zeal and devotion that will be long remembered by those who were familiar with the work; and in addition to performing the duty of distributing the food, a voluntary subscription of \$1,600 was subscribed by the men of the department and added to the Mayor's fund.

One notable fact that will be of interest to persons interested in the study of crime was the great reduction in the number of crimes committed while the relief work was going on. The records of the department will bear me out in this statement that the crimes of robbery, larceny, and "hold-ups" fell off fully 33 per cent. I draw an inference from this, that if our people are provided with work, so that no one would be idle who is willing to work, that crimes of the above nature would fall to a very low figure, as there is no doubt a great amount of stealing done during the winter by persons who are forced to it simply to secure means to sustain life.

In the poorer districts of the city our officers now are held with a great deal more respect than they were ever before. Thousands of people who heretofore have looked on a patrolman on the beat as an enemy, now salute the same officer as a friend. We found a large number of families who were actually destitute, who had never in their lives received charitable contributions, some of them would have suffered long in silence, and probably starved to death rather than ask for assistance, and a few cases we found of persons who had not a bit of fuel or provision in the house and no money to procure any with, but who, when told that their provisions would be brought in a patrol wagon, exhibited a degree of modesty that was surprising, and refused to be helped. Where a case of that kind was found, we arranged to supply them by sending the goods with an officer in citizen's clothing, and while we afforded them bodily relief, we also refrained from hurting their sensitive natures.

As in almost all other work, there was a humorous side to this. I remember an instance of a portly colored woman who was sup-

plied at a station with a large basket containing five pounds of fresh beef, four loaves of bread, and other articles to fill her basket, and who walked from the station to headquarters, a distance of about two miles, and complained that she had not been given food enough. She expected to be supplied with fish and jelly cake.

Among the contributions received at one of our stations was a pair of chromos, called "Wide Awake and Fast Asleep," which some of your older readers will remember as having been offered years ago as a premium with a certain religious paper; the donor no doubt thinking that they would be of great benefit to some suffering family.

I submit the above facts for the benefit of those who make a study of charity, that they may see what can be done in a short space of time, by using a thorough organisation that is familiar with all parts of the city and the location of the poor.